

Message Text

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64

ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5463

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: ELAB, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN HOUSE ADOPTS COMMUNE MERGER LAW AFTER PROLONGED
AND ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE

REF: BRUSSELS A-224

1. IN EARLY MORNING NOVEMBER 23 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ADOPTED
LAW TO MERGE COUNTRY'S 2,359 COMMUNES INTO LESS THAN 600
ENTITIES BY 1977. (A-224) VOTE OF MAJORITY (110) AGAINST
OPPOSITION (84) CAME AFTER UNPRECEDENTED TWO-WEEK DEBATE IN WHICH
OPPOSITION MOUNTED VEHEMENT ATTACK AGAINST GOVERNMENT FOR REFUSAL
TO AMEND COMPREHENSIVE MERGER PLAN. ONLY CONCESSION GRANTED TO
OPPOSITION WAS INSERTION OF FIFTH ARTICLE PROPOSED BY
SOCIALISTS CALLING FOR MININTERIOR TO REPORT ON PROBLEMS CREATED
BY MERGERS BY APRIL 1976 I.E. SIX MONTHS BEFORE COMMUNAL
ELECTIONS ARE HELD.

2. WITH HOUSE PASSAGE OF BILL IT NOW GOES TO SENATE WHERE
GOVERNMENT IS EXPECTED TO HAVE AN EASIER TIME SINCE
SENATE BY TRADITION IS A MORE MODERATE, STABLE ASSEMBLY.

3. COMMENT: IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF TOUGH DEBATE IS THAT MAJORITY
PARTIES HAVE DRAWN CLOSER TOGETHER AND THERE IS GREATER
TENSION BETWEEN SOCIALISTS AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANS. THIS
WOULD SEEM TO PUT OFF ANY CHANCE THAT SOCIALISTS WILL ENTER
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GOVERNMENT IN NEAR FUTURE. HOWEVER, IN NEXT FEW WEEKS

TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT WILL FACE NEW DIFFICULTIES IN HOUSE
OVER BUDGET LAW AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY PROGRAM.
FIRESTONE

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